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NEWS RELEASE

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SELF-PROCLAIMED MARIJUANA ACTIVIST CONVICTED

FRESNO--United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that DUSTIN ROBERT COSTA, also known as Reverend DC Greenhouse, 60, of Merced, California, was convicted by a federal grand jury on November 22, 2006 of cultivating and possessing with the intent to distribute 908 marijuana plants having a street value of over \$1 million and possessing a firearm in connection with the drug trafficking offenses.

According to the trial evidence, COSTA, who was convicted in 1999 in Modesto of cultivating marijuana, was growing marijuana at his former residence in Winton, California in February 2004 when agents of the Merced Multi-Agency Narcotic Task Force (MMNTF), the investigating agency, executed a drug search warrant there. The agents found 254 mature marijuana plants in a greenhouse and 654 "mother" plants and clones in a separate wooden add-on structure which Costa had constructed on his property. The agents also found a marijuana processing center inside his barricaded living quarters, along with a loaded shotgun, shotgun shells, scale, sifters, and packaging material. PG&E records for the electrical usage of COSTA's residence showed an average daily usage of 184 kilowatts, which is unusually high and is consistent with a large indoor marijuana cultivation operation, since indoor marijuana cultivation generally requires the use of high intensity lighting and other electrical equipment.

The jury rejected the defense claim that he was a cannabis connoisseur who needed large quantities of marijuana for personal use. Chris Conrad, a supporter of the legalization of marijuana, testified for the defense that the 254 mature marijuana plants found in the greenhouse would have yielded 9 pounds of useable marijuana, which, in his view, was consistent with personal use. His testimony, however, contradicted his prior testimony in a federal trial in Louisiana last year that 9 pounds of marijuana is consistent with commercial production.

Although California voters passed Proposition 215 in 1996, which legalized marijuana for medical use, marijuana remains an illegal drug under federal law, as affirmed by the United States Supreme Court in 2005.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar of the Fresno United States Attorney's Office, who tried the case, COSTA faces a mandatory minimum prison term of 10 years and a maximum of life, and a fine of up to \$4,000,000 for his two drug convictions. For the firearm conviction, COSTA is facing a mandatory consecutive term of five years.

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